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ABSTRACT

This publication is a general overview of American school boards that explains how they function and why their continued operation is crucial to sustaining participatory and representative government. It comprises five chapters that cover the following topics: (1) a general summary of the significance of school board service; (2) the roles and responsibilities of school boards; (3) boardsmanship from the individual school board member's perspective; (4) the interaction between school boards and other governing boards in the community; and (5) a look at the current and future status of influences affecting the school board movement. An appendix lists resource organizations (12 entries) as well as resource materials (36 citations). The stated purpose of the publication is to increase citizens' understanding of school boards and the importance of local governance in education, and to encourage responsible citizens in communities across the nation to serve as members of their local school boards. (TE)

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AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARDS:

THE POSITIVE POWER

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QUALIFYING STATEMENT

With more than 15,000 local school boards governing public elementary and secondary education in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, it is not possible to capture in a single document the uniqueness of every school board. State and local laws prescribe, in many instances, the activities and/or methods of operation of local school boards.

It is the National School Boards Association's intent that this publication be read as a general overview of American school boards, how they function, and why their continued operation is crucial to sustaining our tradition of participatory and representative government. It is NSBA's further hope that this information about school boards, written by school board members, will spur to action citizens who might consider running for their local boards and renew the vigor of those school board members who already give their time and talent to America's children.

FOREWORD

JONATHAN T. HOWE, president of the National School Boards Association for 1987-88, previously served as NSBA's president-elect, vice president, and two terms as secretary-treasurer. He has been a member of NSBA's Board of Directors since 1979.

Mr. Howe has served on the Northbrook (Illinois) District No. 27 school board since 1969 (president for more than 10 years) and has been a member of the board of directors of the Illinois Association of School Boards since 1972 (president from 1977-79).

Mr. Howe's other NSBA roles include membership in the Federal Relations Network since 1977 and chairmanship of the NSBA Constitution and Bylaws Committee, the Policies and Resolutions Committee, the Development Committee, and the NSBA task force on global education.

In May 1985, Mr. Howe established his own Chicago law firm, Howe & Hutton, after 18 years with a major Chicago firm, in which he was a senior partner.

THOMAS A. SHANNON, executive director of the National School Boards Association since 1977, is a lawyer and educator who served from 1973 to 1977 as deputy superintendent for administration and as general counsel of the San Diego City Schools, one of the largest school districts in the U.S. Before that, he was Schools Attorney for the San Diego City Schools and Community Colleges.

Mr. Shannon has held a wide range of leadership roles in the fields of education and law: president of the San Diego Chapter of the Federal Bar Association (1967); president of the National Organization on Legal Problems in Education (1972-73); founding chairman of NSBA's Council of School Attorneys

Public education is the foundation of this nation's governmental, social, and economic well-being. Our public education is based on the concept of local governance by school boards that are mostly elected (or, in the smallest minority of cases, appointed) to represent the educational priorities and objectives of their communities.

Although there have been struggles to provide schooling for children ever since the Pilgrims landed, it wasn't until the mid-1800s that a national public school system worthy of the name came into being. And it wasn't until just before the Civil War that we finally fashioned, if not perfected, a workable instrument for governing the schools—the school board.

Local school boards acted as agents of the state while at the same time providing local citizens a real voice in deciding the kind of education they wanted for their children—a pattern that accorded very well with the experience of frontier communities in relying on themselves to find local methods for meeting local needs.

In the modern era, public education has, of course, grown to enormous proportions. When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, the nation—and our education system—went into high gear. One of the constructive results was the stimulus to state school boards associations. In the 1960s, they began a period of growth that has not stopped and, today, they provide a wide variety of services that are enormously helpful to their local school boards. The same thing is true at the national level. The dynamic growth of NSBA in the mid-1960s is reflected in the array of materials, programs, and services provided to school boards everywhere.

School boards remain a dynamic example of the American system of representative and participatory government. Yet, many citizens are unaware of the vital role boards play in public education, and some board members themselves only imperfectly comprehend the nature and extent of their governance function.

The current education reform movement has highlighted the importance of school board leadership to the educational improvement of our country's youth. Board members are being challenged as never before to fulfill their board responsibilities vigorously and effectively. They will succeed only if they recognize and appreciate the significance of their roles and gain the full understanding and support of the communities they serve.

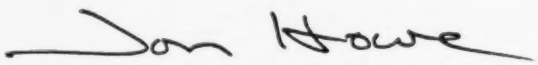
This publication, the culmination of a joint project by the National School Boards Association and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, is designed to encourage school board service and build community support for board activities. It comprises five chapters that present an overview of school board service; the roles and

(1969-70); legal consultant to the California School Boards Association (1963-77); legal advisor of the Association of California School Administrators (1966-72) and of the American Association of School Administrators (1972-77); and chairman of the Public Education Committee of the American Bar Association (1978-82).

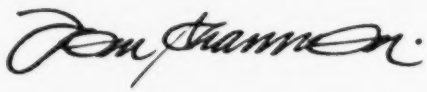
Currently, he is a member of the Education Commission of the States; NSBA Liaison to the American Bar Association; a Visiting Professor in the Graduate School of Education of the University of Virginia; a member of the National Advisory Council of Boy Scouts of America; and a member of the School Law Editorial Committee of West Publishing Company.

responsibilities of school boards; boardsmanship from the individual school board member's perspective; the interaction between school boards and other governing boards in the community; and a look at the current and future status of influences affecting the school board movement. At the end of this publication is an appendix containing resource organizations, publications, and materials.

We hope that citizens will use this publication to increase their understanding of school boards and the importance of local governance in education. We hope also that this publication will encourage responsible citizens in communities across the nation to serve as members of their local school boards. School boards truly are the guiding force of public education, and public education *is* the strength of America.



Jonathan T. Howe
President
National School Boards Association



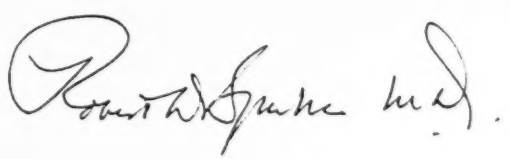
Thomas A. Shannon
Executive Director
National School Boards Association

A NOTE FROM THE W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

In recent years, public criticism of shortcomings in the nation's educational system has become intense. The changing environment of public education has placed an unparalleled burden on the leadership in our nation's schools. At a time when excessive demands are being placed on available fiscal and human resources, effective board leadership is vital to cope with these new challenges.

The National School Boards Association, its federation member state associations, and local boards on every level have an important role to play in addressing these key issues. In this arena, the importance of a forward-looking leadership team consisting of board members and chief operating officers cannot be overstated.

W. K. Kellogg wrote, ". . . the greatest good for the greatest number can come only through the education of the child, the parent, the teachers, and the community in general. Education offers the greatest opportunity for really improving one generation over another." The W.K. Kellogg Foundation is pleased to have been able to provide some of the resources which would help NSBA and local school boards across this country achieve that important goal.



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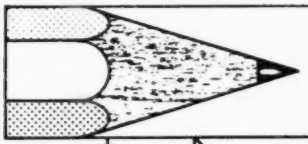
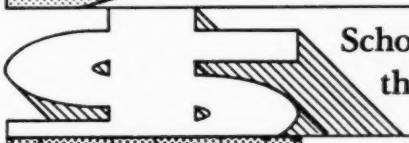
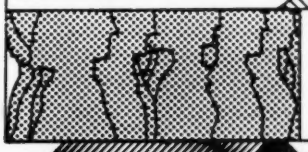
THE SCHOOL BOARD STORY IN NUMBERS



School board members have *educational responsibility* for nearly 40 million students.

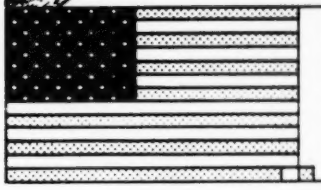


School board members have *fiscal responsibility* for more than $160 billion each year.



School board members have *responsibility as employer* of nearly 4 million individuals.

In school bond elections during 1986, voters approved more than $4 billion for local education improvements.



Almost 4 percent of the entire U.S. Gross National Product goes to expenditures for elementary and secondary education.

Locally, school board members:

- are responsible for citizens' most precious possession—*their children*

- often are the area's *largest employer*

- usually have *budgets bigger than any other unit of local government* (sometimes bigger than all other units *combined*)

- often operate the area's *largest systems* of transportation, food service, maintenance, building facilities, etc.

AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARDS: THE POSITIVE POWER

By Nellie C. Weil

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEING A SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

MRS. WEIL is immediate past-president of the National School Boards Association, having served as president in 1986 and as a member of NSBA's board of directors since 1980.

Mrs. Weil has been a member of the Montgomery County (Alabama) Board of Education since 1974 and is currently serving as vice-chairman. A member of the Alabama Association of School Boards' board of directors since 1975, Mrs. Weil was president of that association from 1979 to 1981.

She is a member of the State Advisory Committee on Vocational Education, the State Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Certification, and the State Committee of 35 to write a career ladder plan to implement recently passed legislation.

Mrs. Weil was selected as a board member of the National PTA for 1987-88. During 1986, she was inducted into the Alabama Educational Leadership Hall of Fame; in April, she was selected, with ten others, as "A Woman of Achievement" by the Montgomery Advertiser/Journal *and received a commendation for outstanding achievement by resolution of the Alabama Senate.*

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

That was correct when Thomas Jefferson said it in 1816, and it's correct today. Ever since the Revolutionary War, we have steadfastly believed that our democratic society can best be served by an educated citizenry. As a matter of fact, our freedom requires it.

What has been the answer to every societal problem we've had? *Education*. How have we been successful in passing our culture from one generation to the next? *Education*.

In fact, the full answer to those questions is, *public education*, because 90 percent of the children who are in school today are enrolled in public schools.

Nine out of ten children being enrolled in public schools is less a justification of public education than it is of the school boards that govern public education, a justification of the effort boards make to ensure that students' needs are identified and met, that parents' concerns are determined and answered, and that business and industry have opportunities to articulate to schools *their* needs.

No nation has demanded more of its schools, and no nation has been better served by the institution of public schools. In truth, no nation even *has* a system such as ours, where we try to provide each child with a free and appropriate public education.

Beyond the core obligation to teach reading, writing, thinking, and computing, just look at what else is on public education's agenda: child nutrition, driver training, access for handicapped children, and answering the public's desire for solutions to such problems as teenage crime, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, tobacco use, AIDS. We need to accommodate families of all types —including those with two working parents, those with latchkey children, and those headed by single parents. On top of all of these are the various mandates from the courts and the federal and state governments.

No time to rest. And, to the credit of school board members, administrators, teachers, and all other personnel in our school systems, we are not resting. We are citizens who yearn for excellence, equity, freedom, and a strong, economically sound America. The public schools *will* continue to meet the diverse needs of students *and* the aspirations of the public *and* the goals of business—because we are the *public* schools.

WHY SCHOOL BOARDS?

The school board is the unit of government best suited to the needs of public schools, because school boards not only represent the public but also translate the public's desires into policies, plans, and goals.

The school board is perhaps the very best example of representative and participatory government, its members derived from the community, serving at the public's pleasure, and making decisions based on community needs, values, and expectations.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The school board is perhaps the very best example of representative and participatory government, its members elected by the community, serving at the public's pleasure, and making decisions based on community needs, values, and expectations.

The School Board Is The Community

School board members are taxpayers, parents, nonparents, business people, black, white, young, middle-aged—they *are* the community. (While representing the majority, boards always have a responsibility to ensure that the minority view is presented and considered.) With 97 percent of all board members being elected (and most of the remaining 3 percent being appointed by elected officials), school board members are directly accountable to the people whom they represent and, in fact, many board members are subject to recall by voters.

School boards are accessible, and they provide a voice for the people. One hopes it is a harmonious voice but, whether the voice speaks dissent or not, it must be articulated. Even while they try to address the needs of the community and make the hard decisions within which a school system must operate, school board members frequently are subjected to criticism—but board members understand that such criticism goes with the territory.

School board members represent *all* of the community and not just the 26 percent who have children in school. But school board members always keep in mind that they're operating within an emotional environment that affects what's most important to most people: their children and their money.

Expectations and Complexities

The public has greater expectations for school board members than it does for any other elected officials, and these expectations exact from school board members a price beyond civic duty. There are no perfect school boards, but the people who serve on those boards earn respect for their efforts as public servants.

It is a serious understatement to say that these are complex times and that the work of school boards is challenging. Consider:

- Local school boards must plan, develop, assess, and implement *by policy* to see that curricular opportunities, for example, are set in place, are of the highest possible quality, and are equitable.
- In employee relations, boards are the ones who, through policy, hire, evaluate, and terminate—and then act as an appeals court while always ensuring that due process is honored.
- School board members must always be fair (and lawful) when dealing with students, teachers, administrators, other staff members, and the entire community.
- Boards must conduct their business in open meetings, with exceptions only in accordance with varying state laws.
- Whatever actions boards take become precedent with the force of law.
- Board members come under the jurisdiction of state codes with legal limitations *and* with limited flexibility in allocating funds budgeted by other units of government.
- Individual board members are subject to all of the laws governing other elected officials and, in many states, must file ethics statements.
- Board members represent the public and are expected to govern the school system while not encroaching on the authority of the superintendent.

The nation as a whole prospers in proportion to the level of education excellence achieved in individual school systems. Our national prosperity is a direct result of the dreams of local citizens for the future of their young people.

- School board members have no authority except during a board meeting and while acting as a board, but the public expects each individual board member to be on duty 24 hours a day.
- In spite of all the foregoing, school board members carry out this primarily volunteer job with whatever commitment of time and personal resources is necessary.

Board Business Is Big Business

Children are school boards' primary concern, but the job of local, lay control has some of the aspects of big business —land acquisition, construction and maintenance contracts, bids on everything from buses to supplies, and, of course, the budget.

The school system's budget is likely to be the largest in the community: the biggest food service operation, transportation system, and employer.

This aspect of board service requires skills beyond "caring." It requires ability and attention to detail and an understanding of how all the parts relate to the whole system. It requires knowledge and good business practices.

Rarely do boards have enough money to meet the needs and expectations of all elements of the community, staff, student body, and the school board itself. In using limited resources to translate needs into reality, local control becomes even more critical.

Local Control's National Nature

Although the local community has the greatest interest in the success of its local school system, the nation as a whole prospers in proportion to the level of excellence achieved in individual school systems. And this national prosperity is a direct result of the dreams of local citizens for the future of their young people. No community is an island.

Who Would Do It If School Boards Didn't?

Were it not for good citizens serving on local school boards, what agency would determine the local community's goals for the education of its children, and who would translate community values?

Who would determine local priorities and bring them to life through public school policy? Who would see to it that state legislatures know local education's needs and make adequate resources available? Who would see to it that the U.S. Congress hears about local education? Who would lobby for public education to remain a state and national priority?

Lobby? Yes, it is part of boardsmanship—an important part, because it is incumbent on school board members to be advocates and ambassadors for public education, to represent the system before other governmental bodies and agencies. School board members must be politicians, because politics is the art of the possible.

And yet school board members must be politically prudent, because someone always will ask for a job for a friend, or a friend of a friend, and these kind of political pressures must be resisted. School board members have to be examples of the excellence that the public expects.

Self-reliance and public service have always been the hallmarks of the American character. It is up to us—current and future school board members—to keep public education strong. Serving on a school board is one of the privileges of being an American.

Ultimate Responsibility, Ultimate Accountability

It is too easy to talk collectively and from afar about the need for excellence in education, to chide and accuse and tell others what *they* should be doing to achieve better schools—but it is the local school board member who is ultimately responsible and accountable for getting it done.

Rhetoric and reality are separated at the ballot box. Citizens serving on local school boards are the individuals who determine needs, fight for high quality, and budget the money to accomplish the missions and goals of the public schools.

Education is a national concern, a state responsibility, but it remains a local function.

The Best System For Getting The Job Done

In a recent report, *School Boards: Strengthening Grass Roots Leadership*, the Institute for Educational Leadership concluded that the local school board is the very best form of governance for public schools, adding that the "American public strongly supports the concept of local governance of education through the school board."

But the report went on to warn that the public knows little of the roles and responsibilities of the school board. This lack of understanding is a further challenge to the tradition of local, lay control, and school boards will be in jeopardy if they ignore the danger.

The characteristics of school boards and of school board members have changed dramatically in the past few decades, but the ultimate goal has not altered: providing an excellent and equitable education to all the children of this nation. If this is not accomplished at the local level, then the nation as a whole is in peril.

To survive, therefore, we need not only a strong system of public education but an equally strong system of local, lay control. The tradition of representative government must be maintained. We *will* continue to have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Those Who Can Serve, Must Serve

The challenge belongs to responsible citizens in every community in this country. This and future generations of children will benefit from a high-quality, equitable, public education if *you* meet your responsibilities to public service—to school board service. *You* have to make the commitment to serve on your local school board, because no one else can fulfill *your* responsibilities.

Self-reliance and public service have always been the hallmarks of the American character. It is up to us—current and future school board members—to keep public education strong. No faceless bureaucracy at any level will do it for us; hired professionals won't do it; it's up to you and me.

Serving on a school board is one of the privileges of being an American.

AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARDS: THE POSITIVE POWER

By Robert S. Ross

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD

School board members are trustees, responsible for a trust established by the community. The beneficiaries of this trust are the public school students in that community. This is why school board members, although usually elected by the adults in a community, owe a primary responsibility to the children of that community. This concept of representation is fundamentally different from one that applies to a state legislator or city council member. School board members not only must keep this distinction in mind themselves, but they must help the citizens of their community come to understand it as well.

To meet their responsibilities to public education, to children, and to the community, school boards fill roles in a variety of areas.

POLICYMAKING

Policies are general rules about what will be done, who will do it, and how it will be done. But much is implied in this deceptively simple definition, especially in what is left out—what is *not* policy. Specifically, policy is not administration, and boards generally do not become involved in the day-to-day administration of their districts.

Boards don't blur the line between policy and administration, because board members know that the result will be poor administration. People would be tempted to bypass established lines of authority to get to the board directly, and questions would arise concerning who is in charge.

The school administration is responsibile for implementing a board's policy. A school board, for example, might choose to require bids for all expenditures over $5,000, with the low bid that meets specifications being awarded the contract. The subsequent *procedures* would include the form to be used on bids, where those bids are to be submitted, how they should be advertised and to whom, when they will be opened, the bond required, and so on. These all are the responsibility of the administration.

Because a policy doesn't "work" until it is implemented and because a board needs to be kept informed of the need for new or revised policies, an effective administration becomes critical to any school board's efforts to meet its own responsibilities.

STAFFING

The school board's most important personnel action is the hiring, review, and retention or removal of the superintendent, who is the school district's chief executive officer.

Basically, schools are organized so that all administrative responsibility rests with the superintendent. Lower ranking administrators report to the superintendent; the superintendent reports to the board. The superintendent, then, becomes the bridge between policy and administration.

MR. ROSS is a professor of Political Science at California State University, Chico, where he has taught for the past 19 years. He is the author of American National Government, *3rd ed.,* Perspectives on Local Government in California, Public Choice and Public Policy, *and* Introductory Readings in American Government. *His latest work,* The Promise and Performance of American Government, *will be published in 1988. He has been a frequent contributor to* The American School Board Journal *and* California School Boards *as well as to numerous professional publications in political science. For 12 years, from 1973 to 1985, he served on the Chico Unified School District Board of Education.*

The local public school system often has the biggest payroll, the most employees, the largest fleets of vehicles, and it services the greatest number of "customers" and disperses more tax dollars than any other public agency, elected or otherwise, in the community.

A board has a responsibility to give clear direction to its chief executive—and then permit the superintendent enough operating room to implement the board's policies. Boards check on superintendents' progress by conducting regular and systematic reviews. This is a challenging role, overseeing while not interfering, but it's a role that good boards fill with skill and diplomacy.

Formal reviews are supplemented with ongoing communications between board and superintendent, the usual procedure being for the board president to maintain this liaison while always keeping other board members informed of situations as they arise.

Other Employees. Technically, the board hires all of the school district's employees, but boards usually don't become directly involved in the recruitment and evaluation of all job applicants.

Good policy provides for a clear definition of the requirements and qualifications for a specific job, with high-quality peer review allowing the experts in the field to determine who best meets the job's specifications. For school employees outside the ranks of teachers and administrators, many districts use a merit system similar to civil service.

Teacher selection, however, is more critical, and most districts either recruit directly from campuses (large districts with many openings to be filled each year find this method to be a necessity), hire at the district level and then place new employees in individual schools, or allow local schools to interview candidates and recommend who should be hired. But again, school board policy sets the guidelines.

Employee Relations

Labor matters take an increasingly large share of a board's time within the collective bargaining rules defined by state law. Boards determine the policies governing the management side of collective bargaining, including decisions about who will bargain with teachers.

Although most larger districts have a bargaining agent, either an outside consultant or an administrator experienced in employee relations, some smaller districts still use the superintendent to bargain with teachers. Whatever method is used, the school board maintains control of management's side of collective bargaining by setting and following policies that spell out bargaining rules.

Fiscal Matters

School board members appreciate a fact of life that many citizens are unaware of: Public education is a major enterprise.

The local public school system often has the biggest payroll, the most employees, the largest fleets of vehicles, services the greatest number of "customers," and disperses more tax dollars than any other public agency, elected or otherwise, in the community.

This major enterprise is controlled by lay persons who are responsible not only for the success of public education but also for the massive delivery system needed to keep education strong.

It is the school board that must keep school districts solvent, effect savings wherever possible, and get the most out

Perhaps a board's most significant impact on students is through the board's determination of what is to be taught—with school board members making those curriculum judgments with input from state governments, universities, political groups, and a wide variety of experts.

of every tax dollar under the board's control.

It becomes critical, then, for boards to have the best possible financial advice—beginning with a competent business manager. Although proper lines of authority require the business manager to report to the superintendent, boards have to pay special attention to this key subordinate position.

Boards often acquire assistance that might, for example, supplement a strong internal accounting procedure with outside auditing. Boards also have to make good use of whatever other public agencies monitor school finances —from the state office of education to the county auditor.

STUDENTS

Although board members must remain actively involved with budgets, negotiations, and personnel matters, board *policies* help maintain direct contact with students by addressing questions of student behavior, participation in extracurricular activities, requirements for promotion, attendance boundaries, and others.

When a student comes in person before the board, the purpose usually is to celebrate something positive—presentations of special programs, awards, and recognition of everything from students winning a statewide vocational contest to a few selections from the new elementary school choir.

But boards also have the final say in expelling students. School board members are called upon to display Solomonic judgment, especially when the administration is recommending expulsion while there are pleas from other quarters to keep a student in school. Because the board's primary responsibility is to students, not administrators, decisions about expulsion have to be based on what's best for all students.

CURRICULUM

Perhaps a board's most significant impact on students is through the board's determination of what is to be taught. School board members make curriculum judgments in light of rulings and recommendations from state governments—and with advice from universities, political groups, and a wide variety of experts.

What students should learn and when they should learn it are among the more perplexing challenges in education, and in meeting these challenges, boards must take into account the latest thinking in mathematics and science education, the best approach to reading, or even which physical education exercises provide improved lung capacity and endurance.

Board members know that the community expects students coming from local schools to be able to read, write, do arithmetic, and have an understanding of the world around them. Boards accomplish these goals by charging their staffs to determine *how* learning is to be accomplished—what should be taught and when.

Politics are part of the reality of school board life—and not always in a negative sense. When the needs of one sector of the community have been neglected, we applaud parents who organize to place their complaints before the board. The school board must be responsive to its community.

States get involved in these education decisions by setting graduation requirements or even approving textbooks that must be used in the state's schools.

Universities get involved indirectly in local education matters by setting entrance requirements: If universities decide that incoming freshmen must have two years of a foreign language instead of one, three years of mathematics instead of two, and four years of English instead of three, the impact on what local school districts offer in their high schools (and the kinds of teachers they have to hire) is dramatic.

School board members study these various requirements and decide on how best to meet them. Whenever possible, teachers are included in curriculum decision making.

All these curriculum matters are judgments made by school boards with advice from staff and with a good sense of what's best not only for all segments of the school system but also for local education as a whole.

Other Roles

School board responsibilities outlined here only begin to tell the story; board members must fill dozens of other roles to ensure that the community's children receive the best possible education. Some of those other roles include:

Community Relations. Pressure politics and special interests are part of the reality of school board life—and not always in a negative sense. If, for example, a board has neglected the needs of one sector of the community, we would applaud parents who organized to place their complaints before the board. The school board must be responsive to its community.

Planning. With the cost of new schools in the millions of dollars, districts obviously need long-range growth plans, and some large school systems now employ a planner and planning department much as cities and counties do.

When a district determines it needs a new school, ways must be found to finance the construction. If the traditional methods (state aid or bond elections) become more difficult to secure, as they often have in recent years, boards seek nontraditional sources of funding.

Consultants. Boards supplement their lay character and the limited professional personnel available in a school district by hiring consultants for special assignments—legal counsel being a prime example.

Boards might bring in expert opinions on everything from bond elections to superintendent searches, but boards also must answer a variety of concerns

AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARDS:
THE POSITIVE POWER

One of the joys of school board service is meeting the needs of all *students—regardless of race, handicap, religion, or language—and finding ways to finance programs to meet whatever special needs those students have.*

(expense, employees' worries about their own jobs) as they weigh the pros and cons of hiring outside experts.

Intergovernmental Requirements. School boards meet federal and state mandates even when districts are not given enough money from the government to accomplish what that government, state or federal, wants done. Public Law 94-142 is a good example: Designed to ensure education for handicapped students, the law requires such an array of services that a conscientious district is fortunate if federal support equals even a small portion of what the district expends to obey the law.

This is one of the joys of school board service, however: meeting the responsibilities to *all* students—regardless of race, handicap, religion, or language—and finding ways to finance programs to meet whatever special needs those students have.

School boards also have to stay attuned to what's happening in their state capitals, where education regulations (minimum graduation requirements and teacher testing, to name two) are formulated and funding levels are decided. It is becoming common to see a delegation of school board members meet with state representatives to urge the formulation of rules the boards can live with and the establish-

As far back as 1647, Massachusetts recognized and passed the law giving members of the local town meeting the right to hire a teacher who would be paid by parents and authorized by a majority vote of the residents. Since that date, local control has been the cornerstone of American education.

From this cornerstone, American education has reflected the way of life of the American people, their customs and traditions, their aspirations and beliefs, and their common values and differences. Through local control, American education has had the flexibility to meet the demands of a new and constantly changing society and has provided the avenue by which future Americans would inherit the traditions of that new society.

From an article in the New Jersey
School Leader
Published in 1976

ment of funding levels adequate to board needs. The discussions can be intense, but for board members to avoid them would be to consign the future of support for education to someone else.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Public education is *our* responsibility, those of us who serve on school boards now and those who will serve on school boards in the future. It is a responsibility we can meet at the local level. It is *your* responsibility—because serving on a school board remains one of the finest ways to meet the higher obligations of citizenship.

School systems can promote local development prospects, strengthen local businesses, enhance educational and recreational opportunities for residents, and build up community services. These elements must be present for a jurisdiction to nurture a healthy environment for private investment and growth. . . .

A recognition of school's importance in developing the economy should be a major element of school-community cooperative ventures. The quality of the local school system is an important factor in business selection of locations.

From How Schools Strengthen the Local Economy
Published by the Northeast-Midwest Institute: The Center for Regional Policy
1986

By Eva K. Bacal

ON BEING A SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

Each school board member defines his or her role in terms of personal needs and expectations. Success is measured according to the impetus that led to running for office and the goals set for board tenure. It is safe to say, therefore, that there are almost as many roles for school board members as there are school board members. But beyond that disclaimer, some commonalities exist.

We all have to spend considerable time training for our jobs as board members. Although most candidates for public office give thought to the issues, few continue to study and train the way school board members do. Most of us attend workshops (on dropout prevention, teenage pregnancy, and substance abuse, to name a few of the timely ones) and engage in ongoing sessions that examine relationships among colleagues and with staff and the community and that cover such substantive issues as curriculum development, staff evaluation, budget review, and personnel policies.

We are on a continual self-improvement course. It's no wonder we're often asked if we are teachers: We believe in education as a lifelong responsibility. If homework is important in school, it is even more important to school board members in the public arena. We know that and act accordingly.

Our hard work is rewarded with a sense of accomplishment, and I'll illustrate this from personal experience:

At the end of our negotiations process with the Tucson teachers' bargaining organization, teams from both sides were urged to work through the night to reach an agreement. To indicate the board's support for our negotiating team, board members stayed up with the team to give immediate answers and authorizations. Actually, we never expected the process would continue through the entire night, but it did—and we remained.

The agreement finally was reached at eight o'clock the next morning.

The following year saw a repeat performance—right down to our board's all-night session.

Why do we do it? School board members find the balance between satisfaction and frustration in our achievements. Even though our expectations almost always are greater than our accomplishments, individual school board members take great satisfaction in the certainty that they do make a difference.

CHANGING, EXPANDING ROLES

As the perception of public education's missions keeps expanding, so do the roles of the individual school board member. Society expects the schools to educate students in more areas, resolve more problems, and yet maintain the high standards that existed in the past or at least in memories of the past. And as board members, we accept all those demands—and the subsequent criticisms, when a demand goes unmet—with the humility of our own high expectations.

MRS. BACAL is a member of the Tucson (Arizona) Unified School District school board, on which she has served since 1979, including chairmanships in 1981 and 1985. Since 1983, Mrs. Bacal has been a member of the steering committee of the National School Boards Association's Council of Urban Boards of Education, serving as chairman of the council from 1981 to 1983 and from 1985 to 1987. In 1983, she also was a member of the Governor's Committee on Quality Education. From 1976 to 1978, she was a steering committee member for the Gate Junior High School Parent Organization. Mrs. Bacal is active in community organizations, including the League of Women Voters, Tucson Urban League, and the Arizona Women's Political Caucus.

The roles of school board members keep expanding as we expect the schools to educate students in more areas, to resolve more problems, and yet to maintain the high standards that existed in the past or at least in our memories of the past.

SHAPING POLICY

In an age of board member activism, it isn't surprising that policies are being reexamined in terms of equity as well as excellence. As membership on school boards opened up to those who had been historically underrepresented or excluded, so the focus of policies was revised. Affirmative action in program development and personnel practices, for example, was on the agenda of many board members before any federal legislation gave it increased urgency. This was especially true in urban districts, where the diversity of population and concomitant social pressures cried out for policies that would be meaningful for the needs of all students.

Because policies are an expression of the goals of the district, they should reflect the expectations of the community. Stating clearly what the direction of the school district should be and then defining the specific areas for improvement are tasks that require skilled board members and willing administrators.

Policy and State Law. School board functions often are determined by state law. Many states, in fact, have sections of law devoted entirely to the duties and requirements for the public schools, describing in great detail exactly what must be done, and when, to comply with the various statutes. In my state of Arizona, for example, the delineated areas are quite specific: every personnel change (hiring, firing, promoting, demoting, and transferring) and all curriculum decisions (individual courses and classes, textbooks, and supplementary reading materials) require board approval. The budget process has the additional requirements of published notification and public hearings before adoption. Further, board members in Arizona have the legal responsibility to visit every school in the district.

With more than 100 schools, 7,000 employees, nearly 54,000 students, and a budget in excess of $180 million, members of our local school board face a job that demands more time and study than any traditional "volunteer" ever gives. We meet these demands because we know what's at stake: the preservation of public education.

Policy and Informed Decision Making. Board members differ considerably in their interpretation of the line dividing policy and administration. In smaller districts, some board members become immersed in detailed operations throughout the district; in larger school systems, board members sometimes must work from summaries prepared by others. The key requirement for all board members from all sizes of school districts is to stay informed.

Policy and Personnel. Generally, boards will set the criteria for hiring teachers and then leave the implementation to administrators, but in hiring key administrators, board members are becoming more active because they know that student success and school improvement are linked to administrative leadership. Whether the board pro-

Members of our local school board face a job that demands more time and study than any traditional volunteer ever gives. We meet these demands because we know what's at stake: the preservation of public education.

ceeds by committee or interviews the finalists itself, the acceptance of a greater board role in this area has taken time and some struggle.

Board members often acquire a talent for obtaining the insights of staff members with specific perspectives while keeping the overall school district objectives in mind. They seek faculty participation in policy development, for example, while remaining aware of the potential distinction between teacher union concerns and the professional concerns of the classroom.

An awareness of appropriate avenues for staff participation within *and* outside the official union-management arena can lead to approaches that satisfy the needs of individuals as well as the demands of organizations. The committee structure, with balanced membership, can result in well-considered recommendations for policy additions and revisions.

How the individual board member handles the area of personnel will help determine that board member's ultimate effectiveness on the board.

Advocacy for Children

School board members have an obvious obligation to be advocates for students. Board members hear students' complaints and requests, with the board being the district's court of highest appeal.

In many states, students' direct involvement with the local school board (as a voting or nonvoting member, for example) is governed by state law, but local districts have found a variety of ways to involve students.

In my own district, one of the ways we sought to open discussion with children was to establish the position of student board member. The students who have filled the board position have been responsible, informed, and informative. They have added an element of immediacy to our discussions and have helped us make better decisions. In other states, laws might explicitly ban the establishment of a student school board position, but the point here is that boards want the involvement of students regardless of what method is used to ensure that involvement.

Board members must be advocates for students by protecting their rights and promoting among them their various responsibilities. *How* this is accomplished is up to the local board, which will have an understanding of the legalities involved and of the community's standards and expectations for students.

School board members synthesize the desires of the community into the goals of the school district, and our satisfaction comes when we are successful in changing the direction of the district for the improvement of students.

Adopting a Student Bill of Rights took my own district's board several years of work and study, for example, the eventual document including a balancing section of student responsibilities and leading to the establishment of a Parent's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.

In regard to discipline, my school board played an important part in changing attitudes as well as procedures. Our insistence that expulsion not be the end of education opportunities for young offenders has resulted in programmatic readmittance that is strictly supervised. We recognize the need to ensure a safe and orderly learning environment for the majority of students; disruptive behavior is not tolerated. But we also believe that schools can be the best place for rehabilitation, and we encourage parents to become involved in helping their children stay in school.

Curriculum. The best way a school board member can be an advocate for children, of course, is to ensure that the district is offering the best education possible. This means that board members have to work as hard as they can to spend time on important matters and not get bogged down in trivia.

School board members all over the country are spending increasing amounts of time on curriculum, for example, but the critical topic still doesn't get enough of our attention. Board members have to become even more involved as textbook selection becomes more public, more criticized, and less likely to please everyone.

The trick is for school board members to keep their eyes on goals for *students*—not textbook critics, not supporters of this reading list over that one, not even on the opinions of experts, but on what is best for students.

Accountability to the Community

Many of the individuals who were protesters during the 1960s are parents in the 1980s, and they know from experience how to make their voices heard.

One of a board member's most important responsibilities is to listen to those voices. And, if policy is to reflect community perspective, board members do well to include the community in their deliberations.

Some areas where policies were developed because of community desires include bilingual education, after-school programs, uniform transfer guidelines, and school closings. Whether the community involvement comes in the form of shouting at the top of the lungs during a school board meeting or is the result of requests for information from the school board, the precedent is firmly set: Involvement is part of public education.

Representative involvement is difficult to achieve, and it has become an irony that, as pressure groups grow more sophisticated in pressing their demands and accomplishing their agendas, it is increasingly difficult to involve the average person in the education of his or her children.

Recognizing this problem as a challenge, board members have become creative, seeing involvement as a positive force that is well worth the effort and occasional aggravation. Expanding the involvement and including

Programs strongly advocated by board members and communities include bilingual education, gifted education, magnet schools, and back-to-basics. These and many more have since been embraced by professionals who were convinced by the response in the community.

more categories of citizens, from the elderly to a school's neighboring residents, increases the likelihood of broad community support for *our* schools. This sense of ownership and enfranchisement results in policies that reflect the community's perspective.

Getting Done What the Community Wants. Individual board members occasionally have pet projects and programs that might have been part of an election platform, programs that would never have surfaced if not for the board member's advocacy. Sometimes education professionals spurn these programs that arise from community and board member support, but it is amazing how well a program can prosper when it has community backing.

Examples of programs strongly advocated by many board members and many communities include bilingual education, gifted education, magnet schools, and back-to-basics schools. What's encouraging is that these programs, and many more, have since been embraced by professionals who were convinced by the response in the community and by the effectiveness in reaching special student populations.

POLITICS

Public officials are political beings. This is not a value judgment but a fact. Whether school board members are elected on a partisan or nonpartisan basis (or are appointed, as three percent are), whether the election is special or regular, and whether we like it or not, politics is the process by which board members are chosen and evaluated, reelected or ousted. This challenges board members to explain the progress of the school system to the public and interpret the successes and failures in ways that enable school leaders to call on the public to help in those areas where we are weak and to applaud those areas where we're strong. Politics and public relations both benefit the school system.

Boards are learning to recognize divergent pressures and needs and to adapt the system to accommodate them while avoiding the confrontational methods of the 1960s and '70s

School board members need to reassure one another *and* the community that there are ways to meet the needs of all without anyone losing out. Individual board members are learning to talk to one another and to groups beyond our usual constituencies, recognizing as we do that good politics expand the potential for success to the entire community.

ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

Public school systems should prepare all students to become responsible citizens. With the enormous trust that has been given school board members, it is vital that examples of the highest possible ethics be set by board members and by others in positions of leadership and visibility. We want our graduates to be idealists, not cynics; to have hope, not despair; and to have doors opened, not closed, because of their education.

But rhetoric doesn't go very far when actions fail to match it, which is why board members have a special obligation toward ethical behavior that goes well beyond the usual restrictions on conflict of interest.

WHY WE SERVE

School board members have a wonderful opportunity to synthesize the desires of the community into the goals of the school district. When we speak for the underrepresented or when we state opinions that have been ignored by the district but shouted by the community, our campaigns become more like crusades. And when we are successful in changing the direction of the district for the improvement of students, even if merely altering one course, then the satisfaction easily outweighs the difficulties.

Board members can be catalysts for change or defenders of the status quo. Frequently, we are a little of each. But when we know that our being there made a positive difference in the lives of students, that opportunities became available and education needs were met, then any adversity becomes less painful.

There are policies and programs in my district that would not exist if I had not served on my school board. The community knows it, and I know it. There is no greater compensation.

School boards occupy a unique position in the American plan of public education. They are composed of lay citizens serving for the most part without remuneration. They represent no special or selfish interest. They have only one excuse for being, one purpose in view—the highest type of education for the children and youth of community, state, and nation. They function as the connecting link between the public which supports the schools and the profession which conducts the schools. They must look both ways, understand both sides, and interpret each to the other.

Edward M. Tuttle
Executive Secretary
National School Boards Association
September 1949

AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARDS: THE POSITIVE POWER

By Robert V. Haderlein

REACHING OUT

DR. HADERLEIN, a member of the Unified School District #248 Board of Education in Girard, Kansas, served as president of the National School Boards Association in 1981-82. For ten years before that, he was an officer and board member of the NSBA board of directors.

A dentist, Dr. Haderlein was president of the Kansas Association of School Boards in 1963-64 and previously served as a regional vice-president and as chairman of the Legislative Committee. He also was chairman of the Crawford County Regional Planning Board in 1963-64, during the unification of schools in Kansas.

He has been a member of the Girard school board since 1957, and he was its president for ten years. He also has served as chairman of the Southeast Kansas Regional Educational Service Center, a cooperative service agency for an eleven-county area.

Dr. Haderlein was appointed in 1981 by U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell to serve on the eighteen-member National Commission on Excellence in Education.

As the need for financial and community support of the public schools has grown, so has awareness among school board members and administrators of the need to engage in coalition building. Predicated on the plain fact that everybody has a substantial interest in the public schools, school boards and their administrators have come to understand that they must reach out to the community:

- to businesses, with their expanding technologies that need academically well-trained employees;
- to labor, a known supporter of high-quality education;
- to senior citizens, whose increasing percentage of the school district population strengthens their political force;
- to civic groups, with their special interests that must be considered;
- and, of course, to parents, nonparents, students, teachers, and all school employees.

BOARD-TO-BOARD COMMUNICATIONS IS THE KEY

The various groups that board members seek to interact with often are themselves represented by boards, and it is this board-to-board communication that has proven to be among the most productive methods for garnering support for public education.

Whenever any group is mentioned as a likely candidate for interaction with a school board, the first order of business has been for the school board to identify that group's own governing board and make initial contact on a board-to-board level. A school board would appreciate it if some organization, hoping to set up a dialogue with the schools, came to the school board first, and it works the other way around, too. Board-to-board is how things get done in the real world.

Also, meeting with the top executive officer in an organization can be very effective in cutting through red tape. School boards have sought to tell chief executives (and their corporate boards) that public education needs all kinds of support—including generous leave policies that encourage employees to become active in working for public schools.

HOW TO ESTABLISH PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Public education cannot, in fact, survive without public support . Coalition building in the community will generate that support if structured properly and if the people involved believe they are being dealt with sincerely. This has meant that school boards and administrators have had to be willing to do as much listening as talking, to develop specific action plans as a result of the dialogue, and to engage in evaluations that assure coalition members their participation is something more than public relations.

To get started, some school boards have found it useful to make a list identifying various constituencies and specifying which other boards and volunteer organizations the schools should cultivate.

The moment citizens comprehend the why and how of education decisions—and become part of the decision-making process—a partnership between school and community begins.

Some school-related (or internal) lists have included all school personnel *and* special constituencies:

- state and national school boards associations,
- education associations and unions,
- parent teacher groups, booster clubs, and
- student councils.

Some community (or external) lists have included:

- parents and nonparents,
- civic organizations,
- members of the press,
- governments (city, county, state, and federal),
- the business community,
- minorities,
- recreation organizations,
- religious and church groups,
- hospital boards,
- service departments (police, health, fire), and
- community activists.

First Meetings Are Crucial. Many school boards launch local efforts with an informal meeting between a representative group from both the schools and the community. The goals of this first meeting often include lowering barriers, engaging in useful and positive dialogue, and exploring the areas in which both groups might benefit from interaction.

As a second step, locally, many school boards budget for a series of luncheons with key community leaders. In a casual atmosphere, the school board president, the superintendent, and a few administrators can show appreciation for past community support and, additionally, foster new support for school district programs.

The keys to success for all these meetings have been found when school board members and school personnel are cordial and patient, listen carefully, and express keen interest in the ideas and opinions of the community leaders. Many school boards have found it beneficial to hold a few of the luncheons in school cafeterias, because a luncheon at school gives community leaders a first-hand look at the institution they're supporting.

These informal events and meetings often are the catalysts for future, and more specific, involvement of the community leaders and their organizations.

Using Citizen Advisory Committees. To enhance communication and interaction between school and community, school boards throughout the country have appointed citizen advisory committees to work with school districts. The moment citizens comprehend the why and how of education decisions—and become part of the decision-making process—a partnership between school and community begins.

Standing committees, a form of advisory committees, can function as a whole, break into subcommittees to study specific issues, or recommend to the board that it establish ad hoc committees.

Mario Fantini, former dean of education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, identified the following types of participation:

1. For public relations.
2. For instruction and curriculum support.
3. For crisis resolution.
4. For school governance.
5. For applying legal resources to education problem solving.
6. For citizen-consumer lobbies for education.

To a majority of elected leaders, the most respected and effective voice is that of the school board member, who is a local leader with a political power base in his or her school district.

Appointing parents, nonparents, key business and professional people, and other community leaders to these citizen advisory committees has proven to be a positive means for school boards to enlist community participation and, at the same time, substantiate the school board's belief that citizens should not only be represented—they should be *involved.*

Working With Other Government Groups

In many areas of the country, the school budget is part of the city or county budget, and local school boards have learned that board interaction with the city or county is beneficial to public education's future success in budgetary matters.

The board of education works with city or county officials by helping those officials promote their various programs or at least by promoting the issues relating to those programs. The favor is returned when the school board goes to these patrons for school improvement bonds. This coalition between the education community and city or county officials and their employees is a beautiful example of two organizations working together to ensure that both the schools *and* the community are the best they can be.

Chamber of Commerce. Many school board members consider the chamber of commerce to be a key community power agency and, accordingly, these board members work diligently to establish interactions between the chamber board and the school district.

Assisting the chamber with its many programs is an effective way school boards have found to promote cooperation between local schools and businesses. Because the school district is involved, board members have the opportunity to address the chamber membership on many school matters, eliciting support from the business community for new school programs, ideas, and bond issues—while at the same time encouraging business leaders to solicit the support of their employees.

Municipality. School boards have come to realize they must—without fail—establish a working relationship with the local municipality.

For both legal and practical reasons, the operations of the school district and the municipality are separate, which means that competition between the two can be spirited. But both bodies receive support out of the same taxpayers' pockets. By breaking bread together, leaders of both agencies acknowledge this commonality and remove the greatest obstacle to cooperation.

Opportunities for support between a municipality and a school district are numerous:

- The schools can provide buses and vans for senior citizens, gyms and fields for recreation departments, mowing equipment for use on a town's golf course, and at-cost lunches to a town's day care center.
- The municipality, in turn, can provide reduced-cost materials for school roadways and parking lots, labor for resurfacing driveways and lots, backhoes and other equipment for school use, and extra security for athletic and other events.

Today is when school boards are approving policies that foster interaction with business leaders, other boards and agencies, and the various segments of education's constituency.

• Together, a school district and a municipality can buy gasoline and other supplies, each enjoying volume discounts that would be unavailable to either alone.

By seizing the opportunity of cooperating with the municipality, a school board can foster a potentially profitable interagency process that can benefit *both* the town and the schools.

State Government. The annual skirmish to maintain and increase state support for public education involves substantive interaction between legislators and the education community. As a result, most local school board members now accept the fact that they are an integral part of the political process—that they are *in* the political arena—and that their communication with other elected leaders is simply a part of essential political dialogue.

Political interaction starts at the local level, where it is important for a school board to win the support of its community leadership. Consolidating that local support will broaden a board's base when the board travels to the state capitol, where a school board is only one of many seeking to influence legislation.

State and national school boards associations play a vital role in providing legislators and other agencies with information about education and its needs. But it is still the interaction between the *local school board* and the state and national school boards associations that provides the communication links extending from the base of the government pyramid all the way to the apex. This local-state-national coalition must be nurtured continually if local control of public education is to prevail.

But it remains the responsibility of the local school board member to contact legislators—in person, if possible—to present education's issues and concerns. It is no secret that, to a majority of elected leaders at both state and national levels, the most respected and effective voice is that of the school board member, who is a local leader *and* a local politician with a political power base in his or her school district.

School board members make the best use of the authority they possess when they are cordial, respectful, practical, honest, and political in their dealings with constituents and legislators.

School Boards Cooperating Among Themselves

Very often, the most effective unit for providing an integrated and efficient approach to education issues is *intermediate* to local and state agencies: a cooperative union of several districts within a region. Such intermediate units can be small enough to maintain sensitivity to local priorities and needs, flexible enough to be fully responsive to local control, and goal-oriented enough to deploy resources efficiently and for maximum effect.

Based on the concept of pooling resources to provide needed services and save money, educational service centers currently operate in 37 states. Such units can provide cost-effective programs for individual school boards while also providing support services such as planning, in-service training, and program development, evaluation, and distribution across school district lines. Costly budget items such as specialized facilities or equipment, food, specialized staff, transportation arrangements, and media resources are maintained by service center agencies

Participating businesses have provided funding for new programs, grants to teachers, and support for special education ventures. And businesses have given more than money: they have donated time, people, equipment, ideas, office space and interest in students.

and used by local boards on an as-needed basis.

Working cooperatively with other school districts through an educational service agency can be beneficial because these intermediate agencies provide a tested, valuable, and increasingly appropriate approach to meeting educational requirements, fiscal responsibilities, and the need for local accountability.

Interaction With Business

Today, the education community and business executives are being pressured to find ways to solve their problems by working together. The "quality crisis" in education, described in several recent reports, cannot be resolved by administrators, teachers, and school boards alone. Similarly, business alone cannot meet the challenges of technological advances and the corresponding shortages of skilled personnel.

The rapid growth of partnerships between public schools and the private business sector is an important new development that virtually all school boards are investigating. These partnerships are an emerging phenomenon promising to be among the most significant trends in public education today. Massive new infusions of money for school districts are not anticipated, but businesses are becoming more aware of and responsive to school needs.

Local programs are the core of the widespread partnership movement, with one company or a group of companies adopting one or more schools. Participating businesses have provided funding for new programs, grants to teachers, and support for special education ventures. And businesses have given more than money: They have donated time, human resources, equipment, ideas, office space, and interest in students. Many school boards are giving special consideration to local service clubs (from the Lions to the Kiwanis) that help schools in ways ranging from direct gifts and donations of labor to scholarships for local students.

A large part of American business involvement stems from enlightened self-interest: *Good schools are important to good business.*

"Corporate training in this country is bigger than our entire elementary, secondary, and higher education systems put together," says David T. Kearns, chairman and chief executive officer of the Xerox Corp. "At Xerox, we'll spend about $200 million on training this year alone." Much of that training will be specialized, of course, but some of it will not be. If schools do not succeed in educating tomorrow's work force, Kearns points out, "business will have to pick up the tab. . . ."

Corporate appreciation of this basic fact is reflected in the growing partnerships between business and schools. Some examples:

- In Cleveland, the business community provided support for a media campaign that some observers credit with helping pass the first bond issue for public schools in that city in 13 years.
- Business-education partnerships are fundamental to the success of magnet programs in Atlanta's public

schools, organized through the Atlanta Adopt-A-School Program—an effort of the Atlanta Partnership of Business and Education, Inc.

- The local board of education in New Haven, Conn., and the Southern New England Telephone Co. are participating in a pilot program called Learning Link, with the telephone company committing $175,000 to the project over a three-year period.
- Northwestern Mutual Life, a Milwaukee-based company, adopted Washington High School, a data-processing magnet school. The company provides speakers for classroom programs and career days.
- By April 1987, more than 510 companies had adopted more than 550 schools in the second largest district in the country—Los Angeles. The goal is to have 700 schools adopted eventually.

In big ways and small ways—but always important ways—businesses are helping schools, and schools are helping businesses. The link is strongest when school board members summon the time and effort to forge it.

ESTABLISHING UNITY

Productive school board/community interaction is being established *today*, because today is when the need exists. *Today* is when school boards are approving policies that foster interaction with business leaders, other boards and agencies, and the various segments of education's broadest possible constituency. School boards aren't waiting for the others to come to them. They are building coalitions to strengthen public education, because to do so is a school board responsibility.

School boards are as *unlike* as the communities they serve and as the personalities on the board. Board membership varies from 3 to 15 persons. Some boards serve large, urban districts. Most others serve rural, suburban, village, town, and small city districts. Enrollments, budgets, staff, and school plants run the gamut of size and complexity—from the one or two-school systems to the huge metropolitan systems of New York City and Los Angeles.

[But] all school boards have an identical responsibility: to represent the wishes of the people and to exercise lay control of educational goals and direction.

From Becoming a Better Board Member
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AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARDS:
THE POSITIVE POWER

By R. Winfield Smith

INFLUENCES AFFECTING LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

Of the many strengths of public education's local, lay governance, few are more important than its resiliency and adaptability—its ability to survive massive changes and meet the needs of a wide variety of constituencies. These qualities will stand local control in good stead in the future—as they have in a past that has seen profound changes in public education.

The consolidation movement, for example, began before World War II and continued through the 1950s—reducing the number of independent school districts from approximately 130,000 to approximately 16,000, with a corresponding reduction in the number of local school board members.

Happily, the tradition of decentralized public school governance has survived, with nearly 97,000 local school board members in the United States today—97 percent of them elected and 3 percent appointed.

ARE SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS CHANGING?

Conducting an annual survey of board members for the past several years, *The American School Board* JOURNAL has found that, since 1978, the number of women board members increased from 25.7 percent to 36.6 percent. Other surveys suggest that women board members tend to take a greater interest in curriculum and instruction, while men are most at home with financial issues.

The trend for minority representation is downward. In 1984, school boards nationwide were 90.4 percent white. Last year, they were 95.2 percent white. The South is one region where blacks and Hispanics have increased their representation, from 8.5 percent to 11.2 percent for blacks and from 2.2 percent to 3.4 percent for Hispanics between 1985 and 1986.

Some observers have reported that the personal characteristics of board members are changing. For many years, board members were likely to have had previous service on boards of a variety of community organizations. They therefore were accustomed to achieving solutions based on compromise and consensus, and they tended to regard themselves as representatives of the entire community. The most recent research shows most board members today have these same characteristics, although some new board members are single-issue candidates, elected because of their support for or opposition to one issue of key importance to them and the citizens who elected them.

But single-issue candidate or generalist, the challenge to the school board member remains the same—to achieve that fundamental goal of American democracy: unity from diversity.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

One of the values of history, rightly used, is that it can help us look *forward*, and the following are topics to which that historical perspective can be wisely applied.

Demographics. By projecting existing social trends to the year 2000, we can foresee some major societal characteristics that will have a profound effect on all social institutions, including schools.

- Estimates show that for the next half-century, Americans will, on the whole, have just enough children to replace the current generation, which means that the number of people between the ages of 35 and 50 will increase substantially and will tend to determine the values, interests, and activities of society.

MR. SMITH served as president of the National School Boards Association in 1968-1969 and was on the NSBA board of directors from 1962 to 1969. He was a director of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association from 1959 to 1963, having served as president of that association in 1962-1963. A member of his local school board in Upper Perkiomen (Pennsylvania) from 1954 to 1982, Mr. Smith served as chairman from 1955 to 1958.

Mr. Smith has conducted workshops for new school board members at NSBA's annual conventions since 1983 and is a frequent contributor to The American School Board Journal.

AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARDS:
THE POSITIVE POWER

The tradition of decentralized public school governance has survived, with nearly 97,000 local school board members in the United States today —97 percent of them elected and 3 percent appointed.

- Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans will continue to increase in numbers and power, offering school boards more of the challenges posed by the requirements and needs of equal education.
- The increasing participation of women in employment outside the home and other changes in family structure already have constituted a pervasive social revolution and continue to hold many implications for education in the future—including such school opportunities as day care, extended care, and early childhood education.

Private Education. The focus on private schools has increased in recent years. Congress has been pressured to provide tuition tax credits for private schools and, at the state level, proposals for education vouchers have been actively debated. These pressures and proposals encourage our public schools to strive even harder to ensure a more equitable and a higher-quality education for all students.

Collective Bargaining. In November 1960, the teachers of New York City went on strike, and the following year they gained the right to bargain collectively with the board of education. Since then, many states have passed laws permitting and regulating collective bargaining, the National Education Association (NEA) has evolved from a professional association that encompassed all professions in the education field to a teachers' union actively engaged in bargaining, and the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, has become an important force in the union movement.

In the 1960s, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) coined a widely used phrase describing the superintendent as "the man in the middle," caught between the board and the union.

Actually, studies show that education has been altered but not transformed by collective bargaining. The negative effects are not nearly as far-reaching as many people predicted and feared. Collective bargaining agreements have neither destroyed the authority of administrators to run the schools nor caused teachers to restrict their work to that required by contract.

Giving Everyone a Hearing. In 1938, the Educational Policies Commission, established jointly three years earlier by NEA and AASA, published a document written by George Strayer: *The Structure and Administration of Education in American Democracy*. It remains one of the most influential statements ever published on that subject.

Strayer recommended that school boards should be small, elected rather than appointed, and separate from municipal government; that they should function as committees of the whole, serve as legislative bodies, and turn over the executive function to the superintendent and staff; and that board members should serve without pay.

Although most of those recommendations have been widely adopted as settled policy for the organization and functioning of school boards, two other recommendations by Strayer still are active goals for many school boards.

One of those said that school boards should be sensitive to, and consult with, all segments of their communities. He urged school boards to keep in "close touch with the people," and he stated that it was "essential that even small minorities be given a hearing."

His second recommendation called for teachers to be given a voice in the development of education policy. This participation should be thought of "as a

One of the greatest challenges to the creative thinking of school boards is to continue finding effective mechanisms for listening to all segments of the community and involving teachers, administrators, and board members in the joint *development of education policy.*

right and an obligation" and not as "a favor granted by the administration," according to Strayer.

Nearly 50 years after Strayer's advice, one of the greatest challenges to the creative thinking of boards is to continue finding effective mechanisms for listening to all segments of the community and for involving teachers, administrators, and all members of the board—in a meaningful way and on a continuing basis—in the *joint* development of education policy.

Pressure Groups. An inevitable part of a democratic nation, pressure groups are old hat to school board members. But the *strength* of some of the newest ones is a phenomenon not many board members have had to confront before.

Paul Simmons, professor of Christian Ethics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., says that the New Right, for example, has formed a coalition of nearly 60 million conservative Christians. Although aggressive, affluent, highly organized, and ambitious, the New Right also is a grass-roots movement, working to influence legislatures, state departments of education, parents, and local school boards.

But the Left, old and new, has sought to influence public education, too—especially in its efforts to ensure that texts acceptable to the Left are kept in classrooms.

A variety of other pressure groups, some of them exclusively local in nature, focus on schools and eventually on school boards. This diversity of viewpoints remains a healthy sign in a democratic nation *unless* the pressure groups disrupt the education process or try to exclude other opinions.

Reform. The latest reforms in education began with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983, and have continued without abatement since that time. Last year alone, we had the report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (*A Nation Prepared: Teachers For the 21st Century*); the first of a projected series from the U.S. Department of Education *(First Lessons: A Report On Elementary Education in America)*; and the Institute for Educational Leadership's *School Boards: Strengthening Grass Roots Leadership.*

The real blockbuster was *Time For Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education*, regarded as a landmark report not only for the very specific and significant recommendations made but also because of the importance of the recommending body (the National Governors' Association). Governors, in addressing their responsibilities, have the power, strength, and ability to be a moving force in public education. And the report of the governors will remain a strong signal to school boards to continue taking stock of their education product.

A look at the sweep of history in which school boards have prospered gives comfort, because each problem solved, each goal reached, and each new group assimilated make public education all the stronger for the next problem, the next goal, the next new group.

WHAT'S NEXT?

No one knows, of course, how or by what public education will be affected next year or in the next decade; we're certain only that *something* will come along that will be as significant as the challenges faced by public schools in the past—from consolidation to Sputnik to the new pressure groups and calls for reform

A look at the sweep of history that school boards not only have survived but prospered in gives comfort, because each problem solved, each goal reached, and each new group assimilated make public education all the stronger for the next problem, the next goal, the next new group.

This country needs school boards, and school boards need good people to serve on them. A look at the past and present gives every indication that the U.S. *will* continue to have school boards to rely on, just as school boards *will* continue to have concerned citizens serving on them.

In a democratic society, social organizations exist as expressions of the people's will. Community interests are reflected—and protected—by boards of citizens accountable to the public. It is traditionally and universally accepted in this country that the professional—the expert by virtue of training and occupation—may have biases that should be counterbalanced by the layperson so the community's broader needs and interests are safeguarded. . . . Individuals with diverse economic and educational backgrounds, occupations, races, and faiths are appointed or elected to boards . . . to foster the community's welfare and to assure accountability.

From The Volunteer Leader
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ORGANIZATIONS

Academy for State and Local Government (ASLG)
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The Academy is a nonprofit organization founded to assist public officials in seeking solutions to critical problems in states and communities and the federal system.

Center for Educational Policy and Management (CEPM)
College of Education
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The Center is organized to improve the use of human resources in schools through research and development activities.

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
379 Hall of the States
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Washington, D.C. 20001
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The Council's primary purpose is to express the views of its members—the state superintendents and commissioners of education—on education issues. Among the Council's major activities are educational technology, the arts and humanities, and international education.

Council For Educational Development and Research (CEDAR)
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Washington, D.C. 20005
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The Council coordinates information services about the activities of its members—regional educational research and development laboratories and centers—around the nation.

Education Commission of the States (ECS)
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ECS provides a forum for the discussion of major education issues facing the states. The Commission conducts research on school governance and finance, schooling, law, and the formulation of educational policy.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management
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The ERIC Clearinghouse collects and disseminates information on school management and administration, collective bargaining, staff development, and school facilities.

Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)
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The Institute acts as an education forum for policymakers in the governmental, nonprofit, and business sectors. IEL's major purpose is to develop the leadership skills of those in education and related fields.

League of Women Voters Education Fund
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The League's Education Fund conducts research on a variety of educational activities related to public policy issues. One of the Fund's primary functions is the development of techniques to foster more effective citizen participation in government.

National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
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The promotion of local lay control of education is a primary function of NASBE. The Association also is an advocate of access to educational opportunity and the improvement of educational quality in the nation's schools.

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NCCE promotes citizen and parent participation in education. The organization conducts research on the extent and nature of citizen involvement in federal education programs.

National Congress of Parents and Teachers (National PTA)
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The PTA is organized to serve the needs of all children and to ensure the preservation of public education by uniting home, school, and the community on the behalf of youth. Among the PTA's major activities are drug and alcohol education, at-risk youth, parent-school relationships, discipline, and adolescent sexuality.

National School Boards Association (NSBA)
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NSBA is a nonprofit association dedicated to the promotion of local citizen control of education where school policy is decided by the local board held accountable to the community through election or appointment. The association conducts research and publishes documents on the topics of school boardsmanship, effective policymaking, and technology in education.

NSBA Federation Member School Boards Associations

Alabama Association of School Boards
205/277-9700

Association of Alaska School Boards
907/586-1083

Arizona School Boards Association
602/257-3700

Arkansas School Boards Association
501/372-1415

California School Boards Association
916/443-4691

Colorado Association of School Boards
303/832-6691

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.
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Delaware School Boards Association
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Board of Education of the District of Columbia
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AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARDS:
THE POSITIVE POWER

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Iowa Association of School Boards
515/288-1991

Kansas Association of School Boards
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Kentucky School Boards Association
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Michigan Association of School Boards, Inc.
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Mississippi School Boards Association
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Missouri School Boards Association
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Montana School Boards Association
406/442-2180

Nebraska Association of School Boards
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Nevada Association of School Boards
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New Hampshire School Boards Association
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North Dakota School Boards Association
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South Carolina School Boards Association
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Texas Association of School Boards
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Utah School Boards Association
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Vermont School Boards Association, Inc.
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